

Conservation Title Sign-On Letter: agriculture, forestry, business, sportsmen, conservation groups, and local entities

Web Form for Signatures: <http://goo.gl/VaokH>

Sign-On Deadline: COB, Friday February 24th

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
The Honorable Pat Roberts
Ranking Member

The Honorable Frank D. Lucas
Chairman
The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member

Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Roberts, Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson:

Our organizations, which include millions of members from all across this country, are writing to express our strong support for the Conservation Title of the U.S. Farm Bill.

We understand, of course, that the deliberations needed to re-authorize the Farm Bill in 2012 will be particularly difficult given the need to reduce federal government spending. We believe, however, that the proposal made by the leadership of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees in the Budget Control Act process last year demonstrates that the Conservation Title can continue to meet vital national needs while sharing in budget reductions.

In our vast collective experience as landowners, farmers, ranchers, forest managers, agricultural and forest businesses, hunters and anglers, local and state government officials, and non-profit organizations representing a wide range of interests, we can say, without any doubt, that the programs within the Conservation Title work cost-effectively to serve the short and long term interests of the American people.

The Conservation Title programs recognize that the health of America's soil, water, and other natural resources is essential to the long term productivity and economic viability of agriculture and forestry, that protecting and managing our natural resources is critical to the future of American communities, and that most of our nation's opportunities for hunting, fishing, and observing nature depend upon privately owned habitat on farms, ranches and forest land. The Conservation Title programs help to protect these resources in a uniquely successful way—by funding a variety of voluntary partnerships and cooperative conservation efforts between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and private landowners. These conservation programs are essential to the sustainability of U.S. agriculture and forestry and to meeting the growing demand for food and fiber at home and abroad.

While America has become a more urban nation, agriculture, forestry and outdoor recreation continue to be essential to America's economy. According to USDA, farm and farm-related employment includes about 24 million jobs. Estimates by the American Forest and Paper Association are that forest management and forest dependent industries account for approximately 5 percent of the total U.S. manufacturing GDP, produce about \$175 billion in products annually, and employ nearly 900,000 people. A study by US Fish and Wildlife Service

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found that hunting, angling and wildlife-dependent recreation contribute \$122 Billion annually to our national economy. Much of this economic activity is located in rural areas where these activities are vital to local economies. Natural resources-based products represent a significant proportion of the export sector so essential to our economic health. Indeed, U.S. agricultural exports exceeded \$137 billion and accounted for a \$42 billion farm trade surplus in 2011, one of the few bright spots in the American economy last year.

Farm Bill programs fund voluntary agreements between the USDA, non-governmental organizations and farmers, ranchers, and foresters -- to keep their land in agriculture and forestry, to preserve natural habitat in rural landscapes, to save the productivity and economic value of soil and water, and to assist in the management of agricultural and forest lands. The result is real conservation with multiple benefits for every region of America. Not the least of these is helping landowners to stay on the land as stewards of America's legacy of natural resources.

Thus we urge you to reauthorize the Farm Bill in a manner that sustains the integrity and effectiveness of the Conservation Title and maintains conservation funding that meets our national needs.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on this critical matter and for your service to the United States of America in these challenging times.

Respectfully,

American Farmland Trust
American Forest Foundation
Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
Land Trust Alliance
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
The Nature Conservancy
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership